

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, December 23. 1693.

Quest. 1. **I**N a Paper of yours some Weeks since, wherein you direct your Querent in his Choice of Books of Poetry, I find you Advise Mr. Westley's Life of Christ to be read, but with the Words (if you have Patience) scurvily interpos'd. Now I having before read over the greatest part of the Book with much satisfaction, and considering that 'tis impossible for all the Art of Men and Angels to Consummate a Poem that can be equal to that Wondrous Subject, the most Noble that ever was or can be in the World, yet upon applying the best of my Skill and Discretion whether I reflect on the Oeconomy and Design, or on the Performance, I cannot but think of the Work and the Author with the highest Esteem: Not but that I can't easily suspect my own Judgment, if I had it not from Ear-witnesses of indisputable Credit, that (not to instance many others) particularly two as accomplished Judges of Sense as any in this Nation, and who therefore now bear the highest Character among Men of Learning and Piety, have not only approv'd the Book, but are pleas'd frequently to recommend it to the reading of all Lovers of Religion and Ingenuity. This being so, I wou'd willingly know what material Objections you can make that will justify your slurring Parenthesis?

Ans. A very ticklish Point this — and we dare almost be confident some Persons will suspect us as too great Friends rather than Enemies to that Poem the Querist mentions, and that for that Reason we made this Question our selves, as they fancy We do many others: But it lyes on the Person who sent the Query, as Opportunity offers, to free us from that Imputation, while We endeavour to explain our selves in the Doubt propos'd, and do an Author Justice, whom we'd have the World believe We had no manner of design to Injure: In order to which We must first Observe, that the Author of that Query concerning Books of Poetry, was, if we mistake not, of the Female Sex, for which Reason We doubted her Constancy might fall her in reading a Work of that length, tho' indeed no more than is Necessary to a Poem of that Nature. Not to add, that the Genius of the Age is generally too impatient to go through any thing that requires both Perseverance and Thinking. Now by that Judgment we had form'd on the reading Mr. Westley's Poem, which perhaps We have done with some Application, We found that 'twou'd be a Disadvantage to it if any shou'd take it by snatches, picking a Piece here and there, since without they read the whole, they wou'd miss that Oeconomy and Order of the Design which you so much commend. This to Explain and Excuse what We have already said concerning it — We cou'd add more on a Work of that Nature, which We think deserves all the Encouragement it meets with from Persons of almost all Opinions, shou'd We not be thought by some Persons, who think they know us better than this Querist, rather prejudic'd for the Author than against him; and besides We know not whether (with some) 'twou'd be any Credit for him to have our Commendation.

Quest. 2. Pray, Gentlemen, what's the Reason that standing on the Wharf at Greenwich, at High-water, one may discover the Sheep feeding in the Isle of Dogs, which at Low-water we can't discern, tho' feeding in the same place?

Ans. A pretty Observation, and We believe it may be true; tho' in the first place 'twou'd do well to be certain whether the Sheep are really feeding in the same place when they are thus visible or invisible, for it seems probable that at Low-water they may be grazing in the lower part of the Island, just on the Rivage, whereas at High-water they may be forc'd up nearer the middle, and higher ground, and consequently be seen there;

whereas when lower they were invisible. But supposing the Fact, exactly as represented, We must now seek for the Reason: There are two undoubted Appearances in Opticks not altogether unlike this, one of the Rising and Setting Sun, which some Mornings and Evenings is seen above the Horizon for some time after and before the Body is certainly above or below it, and can be demonstrated so to be by the Rules of Astronomy. The other which illustrates this, is that of a Shilling, or any piece of Money in a Basin, which if you withdraw your self from it to such a distance as that the Edge of the Basin just hinders your sight of the Piece, and then order Water to be poured into the Basin, the Piece will seem to arise, and float on the top of the Water, and you'll plainly see it then, tho' before in the same place 'twas quite invisible. Something not unlike this seems to happen in the present Case; for either the Sheep being a little below the Water, are seen higher than they are, by Refraction, as the Piece of Money in the Basin, or rather the Vapours which arise out of the Water, being thicker just at the top of it than when further exhal'd, and almost Horizontal to the Eye, renders the Medium thicker, and so makes the Refraction, by which the Sheep are seen. 'Tis there or thereabouts We are pretty sure, and if We han't hit the very White, We ben't far from the matter.

Quest. 3. Why the Organs play before the First Lesson, and agen before the Communion Service?

Ans. For very good Reasons; before the Lesson, to give the Auditory time to reflect on the Psalms, and raise their Minds, by the Assistance of the Musick, to higher Degrees of Devotion, for which those who have try'd it are sure 'tis of excellent use. They Play much for the same Reason before the Communion Service, to prepare us for the more intense Acts of Devotion which are therein requir'd, serving also as a Pause for the Congregation, and especially for the Reader, who in great Churches will have his Strength pretty well try'd by that time he has finish'd the first Service.

Quest. 4. Whether and how far it's lawful to Discourse on Worldly Matters on the Lords-Day?

Ans. So far 'tis Lawful as they are Necessary, or disturb not the Holy Rest which is that day to be observ'd.

Quest. 5. I'm very much troubled about that Text of Scripture, 1 Thes. 4. 17. Pray without ceasing; it being understood by some in the literal Sense: I desire your Judgment and Direction therein?

Ans. There have been some Persons indeed formerly so weak as to understand this Scripture as you do, but we hoped that the World had now been grown wiser. However, for your Satisfaction, We'll first prove 'tis not to be taken in the literal Sense, just as it sounds, and then show you in what Sense it is to be taken. Not in the literal, because it wou'd cross and interfere with other Duties, we being (for example) commanded to read God's Word our selves, and oblig'd to hear it read by others, which we can't do and Pray together. There are also other Duties enjoined in the same Chapter, and in appearance as positively as this, which yet can't admit of a literal Interpretation. To go no farther than the words immediately preceeding these that are Controverted — Rejoice evermore — Notwithstanding which we are in another place Commanded to Weep with them that weep, and that in opposition to Rejoicing with them that rejoice, there being as Solomon says, a Time for all things. Now it being plain from

from what has been said, that this Precept cannot be taken in a strict literal Sense, We must enquire in what Sense it is to be taken, because in some it must be true in some or other. And here 'tis to be remark'd, that We are not Interpreting Scripture to recede any further from the very Words than Necessity compells us; whence it follows, that tho' We are not to employ all our Time in Prayer, yet We are as great a part of it as is consistent with our other Indispensible Duties. We are therefore to Pray in private, to Pray in our Families, and above all to join constantly with the Publick daily Prayers, (unless as before indispensibly obstructed) which have more Promises made to 'em in the Scripture than any other sort of Prayer, and which our Church only, of all that are call'd Protestants, have the Advantage of. But besides this We are to have an Habitual Disposition for Prayer, and actually reduce it into Practice, as often as is conveniently possible, by private and devout Ejaculations. And if we do thus, we think we come up to the full meaning of the Apostle here in his Command to Pray without ceasing; unless it may also have some reference to Constancy in Prayer for the same Blessing, 'till we have receiv'd it; according to that of our Saviour, "That Men ought always to Pray and not to faint — one of which Expressions seems to clear and expound the other.

Quest. 6. *Whether iss Lawfull for a Man, &c.*

Ans. Yes, We believe it is, unless Poligamy were allow'd, which it seems not to be by the Purity of the Christian Law. Our Reason for the Affirmative is, Because there are other Ends of Marriage besides that in the Question, it being design'd as the Church tells us in the Preface to the Matrimony Office as a Remedy against Sin, as well as the other things mention'd before and after it.

Quest. 7. *Are there any such things as Apparitions?*

Ans. Yes, or else all the World have been great Fools to believe 'em, and those few the only Wise Men (as they think themselves) who do not. But for a further Resolution look back to our former Papers and Supplements.

Quest. 8. *A Gentlewoman of my Acquaintance having proposed several Questions to your Society, and never receiving an Answer of any, desires to know why you accept some (which in her Opinion are as impertinent as hers can possibly be) and refuse others, she imagining that you obliged your selves to Answer all: And your design being to instruct the Ignorant, she thought her Sex might have a very reasonable Pretence to trouble you upon that score. If you please to satisfy her in this, 'tis possible you may not hear any more of her a great while; but if not, she is resolved to Persecute you 'till you vouchsafe her an Answer of some kind or other?*

Ans. Madam, We are your most Humble and most Obedient Servants: Athens.

Quest. 9. *Whether Solomon did well in killing Adonijah?*

Quest. 10. *In 1 Sam. 16. 21. 'tis said, Saul made David his Armour-bearer; yet the 55th. Ver. of the next Chapter makes him an utter Stranger to Saul and Abner: How do these places agree?*

Quest. 11. *You have Answer'd forty Impertinencies not worth the while, but refuse many Questions of much greater Concern. I some time since earnestly writ i'ye to satisfy me how you prove this Scripture to be God's Word? which if you cou'd Answer, you'd redeem me out of a dangerous Condition?*

Quest. 12. *What the Soul of Man is? and whether capable of Punishment after this Life? and whether 'tis Just that Punishment should be Eternal?*

Ans. All these and a hundred more *querulous Querists* that lye by us we have already Answer'd; but it seems unless We'll fill up our Paper with References to what we've done before, they won't be satisfied; tho' they have Indexes to Consult for their Ease, which one wou'd think were more reasonable for 'em to do, than still to Complain of us, or Dun us thus for New Resolutions.

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LONDON, Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry, 1693.